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ABSTRACT

This listing of syntactical structures was prepared for a research project being carried out under the auspices of the National Laboratory for Early Childhood Education. However, a number of people have found it useful for other purposes. Teachers who are attempting to use the "natural method" of accelerating language development find it helpful in giving children a language lift. The teacher listens to the child and notes the immature syntactical structures used. She then deliberately models the correct syntax and encourages the child to use it by asking him a question; the child's response to this question demands use of the structure. This list of syntactical structures may help the teacher become more aware of which structures are developing during the preschool years and how to help disadvantaged children acquire them. (Author/AJ)

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Syntactical Structures for Modeling in Preschool Language Training

Selected on the basis of potential contribution to logical thinking

by

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INTRODUCTION

This listing of syntactical structures was prepared by Dr. Bellugi-Klima and Dr. Hass for a research project being carried out under the auspices of the National Laboratory for Early Childhood Education. However, a number of people have found it useful for other purposes. Teachers who are attempting to use what might be called the "natural method" of accelerating language development find it helpful in giving children a language lift. The techique is relatively simple. The teacher listens to the child and notes the immature syntactical structure that he uses. Then she deliberately models the correct syntax and encourages the child to use it by asking him a question, the response to which demands use of the structure. For example, the teacher might find that several of her students use the present tense form of verbs even when the past tense is called for. The child might say, "Yesterday I goes to the park and I finds a nest." The teacher says in response, "You found a nest, Marshall? What did the nest look like? Was it a bird's nest?" Note that the teacher has modeled for the child not only the past tense of the verb "find" but also a transformation of the declarative present, "You find a bird's nest," to the past interrogative, "Did you find?" She also models the past tense of the verb "to be".

Many experts in psycholinguistics believe that the child with his tremendous innate capacity for language will learn to speak the King's English if he hears enough models of well spoken utterances to process and generalize the rules. This list of syntactical structures may help the teacher become more aware of which structures are developing during the preschool years and to help disadvantaged children to acquire them.

Celia B. Lavatelli

Outline of Syntactical Structures

Inflections

Propositions

Auxiliary Verbs in Declarative, Negative, Yes/No Question

- Modals and Do with Negative
- Be with Negative and Question
- Be Past
- Modal and Do with Yes/No Question
- Modals in Declarative

Indirect Questions

Wh Questions

Tag Questions

Coordinations, Adversatives

Comparatives

Complex Nounphrase

Complex Auxiliary Verb

Passives

Affixal Negation

Negative and Indefinite

Sentence Connectives

- Relative Clauses
- Temporal Connectives
- Causal Connectives
- Conditional Statements

INFLECTIONS

(Labov notices an absence of a number of inflections, which have appeared in the speech of children under five years of age. Perhaps some of these should be considered: possessives, plurals, past tense endings, third person singular present indicative).

POSSESSIVE

Show me the pencil's point.
Show me the book's cover.
The paper's edge is jagged.
The crayon's tip is broken.
The jar's cover is missing.
The match's head is made of sulphur.
The spoon's handle is plastic.

PLURALS

The rocks are rough.
The beans are small.
The buttons are round.
The paper clips are metal.
The cards are rectangular.
The rubber objects can stretch.

REGULAR PAST TENSE

These objects floated in the water.
We walked far yesterday.
We sorted the objects by properties.
We asked the man to show us how.
You tried to guess which one.
You wanted to find the hidden object.
We watered the plants every day.
We watched the objects in the water.
You counted the number of blocks.

THIRD PERSON SINGULAR PRESENT INDICATIVE

The rubber band stretches.
The cork floats.
The button sinks.
Ice melts.
The pencil writes well.
The spoon bends easily.
The car rolls downhill.
The bird sits on the branch.

PREPOSITIONS

Put the triangle next to the square.
Put the triangle behind the square.
Put the triangle in front of the square.

Put the penny in the cup.
Put the penny on the cup.
Put the penny under the cup.

Put the button above the cork.
Put the button below the cork.
Put the button beside the cork.

Put the string around the box.
Put the string into the box.
Put the string near the box.

Move the box up one shelf.
Move the box down one shelf.

Touch the inside of the cup.
Touch the outside of the cup.

Move the button from Frank to Jim.
Move the button to Frank from Jim.

Put the penny between the corks.
Put the penny among the corks.

(To test for comprehension of prepositions, one might need to set up the materials in a particular way. For "between-among" distinction, one would need two corks on the one side, and more than two corks on the other, for example.)

MODALS IN DECLARATIVE SENTENCES

You must use the spoon to stir it.
You can make the liquid darker.
It will look clear.
Your partner will help you.
It will thicken overnight.
You can grind it.

We might use several of the jars.
The color would look darker under this light.
We may try again tomorrow.
You could try it this way.
The level of the liquid would change.
This jar might weigh the most.
We would blow up the balloon this way.

MODALS AND DO WITH NEGATIVES

These objects can't be eaten.
These objects wouldn't be found out of doors.
These objects won't stretch.
These objects shouldn't get wet.
You couldn't break these objects.
You may not be able to sort all of them.
The cork will not sink.
You can't make the shavings back into a piece of wood.
These liquids won't mix.
You shouldn't see your partner's materials.

These objects don't grow.
These objects don't move, breathe, or see.
This object doesn't have metal in it.
These buttons don't have holes through them.
You don't need a partner for this game.
We don't try to sort them all.
You don't have to stir it.

BE - NEGATIVE AND QUESTION

(Labov outlines some patterns of nonstandard Negro speech. Differences may occur in the shape of the negative. For example, he cites the following from children: "It don't all be her fault." "He ain't here" "He ain't start it." "Ain't that a shame?" If these are to be included in the study, the full range of subjects should be used.)

This object is not round.
These stones are not smooth.
It is not used for writing.
They are not things that grow.
He is not touching the older objects.
She is not looking at your objects.
We are not going outside today.
You are not going to work this morning.
I am not going to suggest what to do today.

(The above could also be presented in contracted form "isn't, aren't," to correspond to the so-called negative question.)

Isn't this object round?
Aren't these stones smooth?
Isn't this used for writing?
Aren't these things that grow?
Isn't he touching the other objects?
Aren't we going outside today?
Aren't you going to work this morning?

BE WITH PAST TENSE

(Use range of subjects: I, you, he, she, it, we, they, noumphrase singular, nounphrase plural).

BE Past

The papers were wet.
The car was broken.
He was tired.
She was using the liquids yesterday.
You were looking at floating objects last week.
We were talking about gases last time.
I was showing you a set of buttons this morning.
It was raining earlier today.
They were all floating before.

BE Past Negative

These pieces were not shaved. (weren't)
This baloon was not filled with air. (wasn't)
He wasn't using it.
She wasn't sitting there.
It wasn't white before.
They weren't able to float.
You weren't using these objects before.
We weren't looking at round objects yesterday.

BE Past Question (Affirmative and Negative)

Weren't crystals put into this jar?
Wasn't this piece of sugar ground up?
Was this the one you had yesterday?
Were these the objects you used?
Was this the smallest button?
Were these the only white objects?
Were these stones both rough edged?
Wasn't this one of the floating objects?
Weren't these the objects which could stretch?

YES/NO QUESTIONS

(The children in our study asked well-formed yes/no questions - with auxiliary verb and inverted subject - by the time they were five. One could elicit such questions from the children with a "20 questions" game. Suppose the children have a collection of objects in front of them. The teacher might say: "I'm thinking of one of these objects and you have to find out which one. Ask questions that I can answer

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by saying "yes" or "no"." The children should first name all the objects. The teacher can play the role of questioner, when the child has an object in mind. In keeping with the discovery of properties of objects, one should not use the object name. Thus, "Is it round?" not "Is it a button?").

With Modal Auxiliary Verbs

Can you blow it up?
Can you write with it?
Will this float in water?
Might you use this for sewing?
Would this piece burn?
Won't this object break easily?
Couldn't the crayon melt in hot weather?
Wouldn't this be used for eating?

With Do

Do you use these for writing?
Does it break easily?
Do they look alike?
Did it come apart?
Did this animal have fins?
Doesn't it float in water?
Does this object melt when heated?
Do the round objects weigh the same?
Don't these plants grow under water?
Does this animal have a long neck?

(A variation of this game would be to have the children answer the questions with respect to a particular array. For example, the collection of objects on page 3. Child has one object in mind.

Teacher:	Child:
Does the object have round edges?	No, it is not a button or a ring.
Does the object have paper around it?	No, it is not the crayon.
Does the object have a sharp point?	No, it is not the thumbtack.
Does the object grow in nature?	Yes, it is the bean.

BE - AFFIRMATIVE AND QUESTION

(Labov has outlined some sources of reading problems for Negro speakers of nonstandard English. One of these is the general absence of the copula in sentences.)

This spoon is plastic.
These rocks are jagged.
You are asked to sort these objects.
He is sitting next to you.
She is going to work with you.
You are all going to collect objects in the field.
We are studying floating objects today.

It is red.
They are all round objects.

(Probably it is preferable to use the full form of the copula, although it is ordinarily contracted in colloquial speech. Using the full form shows the relationship to yes/no questions more clearly. Compare the following:

He's coming.	We're finished.
Is he coming?	We are finished.
He is coming.	Are we finished?)

Question forms of the above set of sentences show the full form of the copula. For example:

Is this spoon plastic?
Are these rocks jagged?
Is she going to work with you?
Is it red?
Are they all round objects?
Is he helping you?
Is she working with you?
Are we all ready?
Are you looking at the round objects?

INDIRECT QUESTIONS

(These were mastered by the children in our study. Labov notes that in embedded questions in nonstandard speech he studied, word order of original question is preserved, as in: "I don't know how did I do it.")

He doesn't know how he can do it; perhaps you can help him.
I didn't see what you did.
Find out where you can put them.
Ask your partner how he did it.
I don't know who finished first.
I wonder why you did it this way.
Let's see when you will finish sorting them.
Tell your partner where he should put the round ones.

(others with how, why, what, when, where, who)

WH QUESTIONS (Use different interrogative words - who, what, where, when, why, how which - and variety of auxiliary verbs - be, do, have, modals - and some negative questions)

Which objects are made of two materials?
What can you use the long objects for?
Who has a red button?
What things can't you use for writing?
What couldn't you stretch?
What doesn't burn?
What isn't heavy?

What did this look like before?
Where can you find metal objects in this room?
What objects made of rubber are there in your collection?
How did you sort your buttons?
Which are the long ones?
Where did you put the round objects?
Who knows the answer?
Which are the dark ones?
When did we put the ice on the plate?
Where did you find this object?
Which ones can you stretch?
Who chose the rocks?
Where are the jagged ones found?
What animal has long ears?
When will the ice be melted?
What objects always float?
Who can find the one that is different?
Which pieces of wood are light?
What metal is shiny?
Why did the ice melt?
Why does this float?
How could you guess which ones will float?

(These can be elicited as a two person game. Suppose we take the collection of objects on page 3. Child A thinks of an object and must answer questions. Child B must ask what, where, who questions. Example: B Where could you find this object? A Out of doors. B How big is it? (Answer with respect to the array) A It is small. B What can you do with it? A You can eat it. B It must be the bean.)

TAG QUESTIONS

You can grind it, can't you?
It will look clear, won't it?
This won't thicken overnight, will it?
This object can't float, can it?

The color would look darker under the light, wouldn't it?
You could try to do it this way, couldn't you?
You couldn't blow the balloon up this way, could you?
You wouldn't fill the jar to the top, would you?

We should have tried to weight these stones, shouldn't we?
The ice should be melted soon, shouldn't it?
You could have done it a different way, couldn't you?
This jar couldn't have been filled with oil, could it?

This spoon is plastic, isn't it?
These rocks are very jagged, aren't they?
These stones are not smooth, are they?
This button isn't round, is it?

You put all the dark ones in one tray, didn't you?
We tried them all, didn't we?
We didn't count the objects, did we?
You don't need more, do you?

COORDINATIONS

Put the cork and the button in the water.
Put the ice and the sugar in the refrigerator.
The wood and the shavings are of the same material.
The round button and the square button are both small.

Wash and dry the cork.
Write on and cut the paper.
The cork floats and spins in the water.
The paint colors and protects the wood.

Water the plants and feed the animals.
You can observe gases, and she can study liquids.

ADVERSATIVES

This is tall but light.
This object can float, but not that one.
This object has two materials, but that has only one.
This object is square but not large.
This animal has a long neck but small ears.
I am thinking of an object which is dark but not heavy.

DISJOINT

Pick out either the large ones or the dark ones.
Find the buttons which are square or triangular.
A round piece or an oval piece belongs in this pile.
I can use large ones or small ones.

COMPARATIVES

(These are rather late in appearance, in terms of cognitive structures--see Piaget, Sinclair - and syntactic structures. Chapter three provides materials for this problem.)

Find the shinier piece.
Find the darker liquid.
Show me the shorter stick.
Point to the wider one.
Take the thinner piece.
Give your partner the heavier stone.

The longer stick belongs here.
The bigger piece will also float.
The lighter color goes with this one.
The redder liquid is vinegar.

Show me the jar which has the thicker liquid in it.
Touch the pile which has the bigger pieces in it.

(also higher, clearer, tighter, looser, fuller, smarter, prettier, softer, harder, etc.)

Point to one that is longer and thinner.
Show me one which is wider and shorter.
Find one which is narrower and taller.
Give me one that is smaller and lighter.
Find the one that is darker and higher.
Find the one that is clearer and lower.

COMPLEX NOUNPHRASE

(The children in our study used nouns modified by one modifier and perhaps also a determiner. Rarely did we find more complex nounphrases used. Requirements of these tasks include precise description and definition of properties of objects. This can be incorporated into a complex nounphrase.) (Describe objects by properties, without using names.)

Show me the long red object.
The longer narrower stick goes here.
I am thinking of the white, rectangular small object.
Find the large round red rough button.
Find the small, square, shiny button.
Find the white triangular two-holed button.
Find the metallic shiny objects.
The jagged rough uneven objects belong here.
The square brown rough object goes on this side.
The furry bushy-tailed animal lives on the land.
This long-eared hopping animal likes carrots.
The black and white striped animal belongs with these others.
The rough streaked pieces go here.
The fine light shavings are like this piece of wood.
The coarse dark shavings are like this piece of wood.
The thick clear liquid is called what?
Find the cloudy white liquid.
Find the yellow oily liquid.
Give me the short narrow piece.
Give me the dark clear one.
(These descriptions, or variation on them like: Find the one which is yellow and oily, can be elicited. Two children work in pairs, separated by a screen, but each with the same array of materials in front of him. Child A must describe each material or object so that the other child can identify it. Restriction: no names, only description of properties.)

COMPLEX AUXILIARY VERBPHRASE

(More than one auxiliary verb per main sentence. These could be elicited by asking children to describe games to another child so that he could play. "Hide and Seek", "Dodge Ball", "Tag", "Red Light, Green Light", "Scissors, Paper, Rock" are all excellent for this.) (Lesson Plans from Material Objects which involve processes are suitable for this.)

This liquid could be made thinner.
These shavings might have been mixed with some of these.
You could have seen the color yesterday.
We should have tried to weigh these stones.
This plant will be taller than that one.
This liquid might be soapy water.
This ice should be melted soon.
We could have done it another way.
You might have sorted them like this.
This jar could have been filled with oil.

PASSIVES

(Full passives of the type "the cat was chased by the dog" and colloquial passives "this cup got broken")

The ice will be melted quickly by the heat.
You are asked to sort these objects.
The car was broken by the children in the other group.
These pieces were not shaved.
This liquid could be made thinner by adding water. (was)
These shavings might have been mixed with some of these.
These shaving were mixed with some of these.
This jar was filled with oil this morning.
The crackers were eaten by the birds.
The animals were tamed by the Indians.
The trees were sprayed by the farmer.
The animal was injured by the fire.
The clay was hardened by the sun.
The color was changed by adding vinegar.
The buttons were sorted by your partner yesterday.
The liquid was poured into another jar.
The balloon got filled with air.
The paper clips are attached to the cards.
The rubber band was stretched around the box.
The handle of the spoon got broken yesterday.
The cover of the jar was lost by the other class.
These objects were found out of doors.

AFFIXAL NEGATION

(This is a later appearing development in the speech of the children we studied.)

Some of you may be unable to finish today.
The color is unimportant.
Try to work unassisted.
The color is unchanged.
Find a piece that is undamaged.
The page is uncut.
This liquid is undrinkable.
The cracker is uneatable.
The clay is unhardened. (unbaked)
This animal was uninjured by the fire.
The next period of the morning is unplanned.

This box is the only one unopened.
This liquid is unsafe to touch.
This animal is unsteady when he walks.
These animals are untamed.
This plant has been untied from the stake.
Find one which was untouched.
If you are unsure, ask your partner to say it again.
Throw away the part that is unwanted.
The yarn was partly unwound.

NEGATION WITH INDEFINITES

(The children we studied did not have all the rules for the relation of negative and indefinite even at a rather late period. In addition, Labov notes that negative sentences with indefinites have special variants in nonstandard Negro dialects. He notes sentences like "He don't know nobody" "Ain't nobody see it" and others. Notice the location of the negative - is it connected with the auxiliary verb of the sentence or not - and the relationship of negative and indefinite forms - no, none, nobody, nothing, never, any, anybody, anywhere, anythime, etc.)

Negative before Auxiliary Verb

None of these is round.
Nothing on my tray is made of any kind of metal.
None of these animals ever go near the water.
None of the children saw anythind in the bag.
Nothing on this tray was seen by any of the children on this side of the room.
Noone used any of the liquids today.
Nobody told me what to do.
No buttons are on any of the trays.
Noone found any of the hidden objects.
These animals never fly in the air.

Negative with Auxiliary, and Indefinite after

I don't see anything that is round.
This object can't scratch any of the other objects.
These objects can't float in any liquid.
This car hasn't any driver.
This pencil hasn't any point.
I didn't ask any of you to come up here.
John doesn't have any partner.
He doesn't know anybody in the room yet.

Other

This watch has no hands.
I see nothing that is round on any of the trays.
These objects have no metal in them.

This pencil doesn't have a point, and this pen doesn't either.
This animal hasn't any fur, and neither does this one.

RELATIVE CLAUSES

Whatever objects you find can be used.
What buttons you have left can be sorted again.
What you can't sort, you can put to one side.
Whoever finishes sorting all the objects, can be first in the next game.

You should try to float whatever objects you have collected.
Try to guess what your partner has in his grab bag.
Your partner will tell you what properties it has.
You can ask any questions that can be answered with yes or no.
You may sit wherever you please.
You can sort however you like the objects that are left.
Listen carefully to what your partner tells you about his object.

The buttons which are left should be sorted again.
The children who are finished first can paint.
The objects which float can be put into piles of large and small.

Here are four buttons that are round.
You guessed the one that I had in mind.
Ask me anything that I don't make clear.
We found only a few that did not float.
It's the round buttons that should be put in piles of light or dark.

TEMPORAL CONNECTIVES

(before, after, when, as soon as, etc. Rearrange order of parts of sentence.
If necessary, teach meaning with simple situations first.)
(These occur very late in the developmental sequence, and perhaps should
not be used unless the children are rather advanced.)

Before you begin the game, choose a partner.
Until the ice has melted, the plate should not be moved.
Now that the objects are in order, you can move your trays.
After you put the pieces on the tray, we can try another problem.
When the ice is melted, we will freeze it again.
Since this will take a few minutes, you may want to sit down.
As soon as this is done, you can paint.
While the color is dissolving, we can look at these.
The level of the liquid in the jar rises after you add an object.
This side of the room will start before the other side.
Choose all the round ones before you start sorting.
It's your turn after you guess what I have in my hand.
After you see which objects float, compare with your partner.
Before you start, make sure your tray is clear.
Raise your hand as soon as you have tried them all.

CAUSAL CONNECTIVES (May need to teach meaning of "because".)

The balloon gets bigger because it is being filled with air.
These objects float because they are light.
The ice melts because it is warm in the room.
Because of the heat lamp, the ice is melting faster.
You may leave early because you finished first.
In the refrigerator, ice freezes because the temperature is below 32 degrees.

Because this stick is the shortest, it goes on the end.
Put this with these other buttons, because it is large.
Put the dark ones here and the light ones there, because we want to sort the objects.
In order to guess the one I am thinking of, you must ask me questions.

CONDITIONAL STATEMENTS (Remember that the clauses can occur either before or after the main proposition without changing the meaning. Try both ways.)

If this piece floats, then try the larger one.
If the ice is not melted, wait another five minutes.
If it sinks, take it out and put it on the red tray.
If your partner guesses correctly, go on to the next.
Try another one, if your partner fails to guess.
Unless it is round, put it in the basket.
Put all the long sticks on one side unless they are red.
If you push in the plunger, what will happen to the balloon?
If you pull out the plunger, how will the balloon look?
If you have all the round ones on your tray, sort them into large and small.
If there are any left over, put them in a separate pile.
If it isn't wood, put it to one side.
Don't take the piece out if it floats.
Don't take the piece out unless it floats.